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SENIOR WHIP

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2003

May 23, 2006

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The May 3 theft of computer disks containing the personal data of approximately 26.5 million veterans and their spouses has caused great concern across the United States. This incident has also raised troubling questions about the adequacy of security measures that are in place to protect sensitive information throughout the federal government.


The Department of Veterans Affairs' statement directs veterans to the www.firstgov.gov web site and promises them a one-time free credit report, which they are already entitled to under current law. Unfortunately, the VA's response does not provide the affected individuals with any additional protections they need to guard against identity theft, nor does it reflect a strong commitment by the Administration to adequately safeguard personal information maintained by other federal departments and agencies.

The federal government must do more to ensure that the personal information of Americans is protected. Therefore, I urge you to issue an Executive Order to all federal departments and agencies to utilize the most advanced technology available to encrypt and protect the personal data of all American citizens.

I also urge you to order the VA to facilitate the placement of fraud alerts with the Credit Reporting Agencies (CRA) for any veteran who requests one. A fraud alert requires the verification of identity before credit can be approved, and would provide important protection for the millions of veterans who have had their personal information compromised. The onus should be on the VA to work with veterans and the CRAs to ensure that our nation's veterans are protected from identity theft.

It is clear that we are in a new era of information technology, and we must use the most up-to-date technology to protect the personal information of Americans. At the same time, the federal government must do all it can to prevent any adverse consequences that may affect the 26.5 million veterans who - through no fault of their own - are at additional risk of identity theft.

Respectfully,


Benjamin L. Cardin
Member of Congress

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